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SERVICE

USDA'S REPORT TO CONSUMERS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE • OFFICE OF COMMUNICATION • WASHINGTON, D.C. 20250

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NEW PUBLICATIONS FROM FSQS

Information Is A Two-Way Street. Two new publications from USDA's Food Safety and Quality Service are all about information: how to get it and how to give it. One, "Information Available from USDA's Food Safety and Quality Service," lists more than 100 publications and other materials. Consumers will find booklets on how to keep food safe to eat or how to use USDA grades in buying foods. Teachers will see listed lesson aids on buying and using foods. Food producers and processors can choose materials on FSQS services available to them. The second publication also provides information to the public but with a two-way view: it tells citizens how to provide information to FSQS. "Public Participation in Government Rulemaking" explains the procedures the agency uses to issue rules and regulations for the programs it administers. It gives step-by-step procedures that citizens can follow to get in on the action and to be a part of the rulemaking process. With these publications, you can be the informed and/or the informer. Single free copies of each publication may be requested from the Information Division, Food Safety and Quality Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

MARKETING FRESH PRODUCE

There Are Ways And Ways. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has been paying grants to states that devise ways to get agricultural products directly from farmers to consumers. Basic routes for getting the products straight from farm to table include: farmers to markets to consumers...farmers going directly to consumers...even consumers going to the farmers. For example, one state is organizing producers to sell farm products directly to consumer cooperatives. Two states are teaming up to locate farmers markets at inner-city sites so farmers and low-income consumers can get together. Other states are looking into roadside markets, open air markets, consumer groups organized to buy directly from farmers, produce markets on wheels to serve heavy-population areas, and pick-your-own farms where city people can pick fresh produce and pay by the size of the container. Many of these projects are not new, but carry a note of nostalgia back to a time when farmers and consumers had more direct contact. But direct farmer-to-consumer marketing can again play an important role in the food chain: it provides a way for consumers to buy fresher, locally-grown foods at reasonable prices and for farmers, especially those with small operations, to get a greater return for their labor.

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NITRITES AND NITROSAMINES

USDA Renders Decisions. Somewhere back in antiquity, someone discovered that nitrates help preserve meats. Much later in history it was discovered that nitrates undergo chemical changes in meat to become nitrites and that nitrites are what help prevent botulism in cured meats. Then came the discovery that nitrites could form cancer-causing nitrosamines, especially in cured meats such as fried bacon that are cooked by high temperatures. So came the problem: to use nitrites and avoid botulism or not to use nitrites and avoid nitrosamines. Recently, the U.S. Department of Agriculture acted to resolve the problem. First, USDA proposed to lower the amount of nitrite that can be used to cure bacon to 40 parts per million(ppm), about two-thirds the amount presently used by most meatpackers. Either sodium nitrite or potassium nitrite would be used in combination with .26 percent by weight of potassium sorbate. According to data available to USDA, this formula gives protection against botulism equal or superior to formulas currently used and it eliminates confirmable levels of nitrosamines. The proposal will become effective within 1 year unless data are submitted to USDA to show these reduced levels of nitrites would not prevent confirmable levels of nitrosamines and would not prevent botulinal hazards. USDA's second action was to issue a final regulation, effective as of June 15, 1978, and in force until the proposed 40 ppm regulation goes into effect next year. This final regulation requires bacon to be made using 120 ppm sodium nitrite or potassium nitrite plus 550 ppm sodium ascorbate or sodium erythorbate. Also under the final regulation, cooked bacon could have only 10 parts per billion(ppb) nitrosamines, the lowest level that can be confirmed under present commercial laboratory capabilities. Required nitrosamine levels will be lowered to 5 ppb within the year as laboratory capabilities are developed. Between the ppm's and the ppb's, it is obvious that a little nitrite goes a long way.

SNAGS WITH CAVITIES

Home Sweet Home For Birds. The ivory-billed woodpecker is on the endangered species list mainly because it hit a snag. Or, more correctly, because it didn't hit a snag. The woodpecker, an avaricious insect eater, is one of more than 80 North American bird species that nest in cavities in dead or deteriorating trees--called snags. Often such snags are removed from forests because they are not esthetically pleasing, interfere with forest management practices, may harbor insectpests, or may be fire or safety hazards. But, according to USDA's Forest Service, some dead trees should be left in the forests to provide homes for cavity-nesting birds. A new Forest Service publication summarizes that is known about the habitat requirements of 85 of the bird species which use holes in trees for rearing their young. The book is illustrated with color drawings of the birds and maps of their summer and winter ranges. The book is meant as an aid to forest land managers and owners but will serve as a useful guide to teachers, naturalists, environmentalists, or anyone with an interest in birds. Copies of "Cavity-Nesting Birds of North American Forests" (AH-511) may be purchased from the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402 for \$2.75.

AGRICULTURE USA

Blest Be The Tie. When you sit down to count your blessings, by all means put agriculture on the list. Farmers are among your best friends. They make possible the food on your table (and the table, too, if it is wooden), the clothes on your back, and the roof over your head, to mention a few of their more obvious credits. Agriculture is also the nation's biggest business with assets equal to about three-fourths of the assets of all U.S. manufacturing corporations. It is the nation's largest employer with 1 out of every 5 jobs in private enterprise dependent upon or related to agriculture. Agriculture's impact on our lives is daily, varied, taken for granted, and often not recognized at all. These and other ways that our lives are tied to agriculture is illustrated in "Agriculture USA." The 16-page pamphlet is an easy-to-read, handy reference to some facts and figures that might surprise you and, of course, will help you total up the blessings count. Free copies of "Agriculture USA" are available from the Office of Governmental and Public Affairs, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

YOUNG ADULT CONSERVATION CORPS

At Work In The Great Outdoors. Year around jobs are available for unemployed and out-of-school youths, ages 16-23, through the Young Adult Conservation Corps (YACC). YACC enrollees are involved in all types of conservation work on national forests, national parks, fish hatcheries, wildlife refuges, and other public lands. YACC members, who may work at a residential camp or on a non-residential work project, earn the minimum hourly wage. They must be able to perform physical work. Some 22,000 young people are expected to work in the program during 1978. Applications for enrollment in the YACC are available from state employment offices. The YACC is one of two youth work programs administered jointly by USDA and Interior. The other, the Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) provides jobs for 15- to 18-year-olds during the summer months only. Applications are closed for the 1978 YCC program. Enrollment for the 1979 summer YCC will be announced in January-February 1979. For additional information on YCC or YACC write to the Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, P.O. Box 2417, Washington, D.C. 20013.

CHILDREN, NATURE AND THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT

Growing Up Without Forests. Today's urban child has become separated from the natural environment of forests and fields. USDA's Forest Service sponsored a symposium-fair to discuss the effects of this separation on a child's development. Thirty-three of the papers presented at the symposium have been published in a volume entitled "Children, Nature and the Urban Environment." The book is divided into three sections. The first section deals with the role of the natural environment in human development. The second discusses theory and research on urban children and the natural environment. And the third is devoted to activities with children in natural environments. Copies of "Children, Nature and the Environment: Proceedings of a Symposium Fair," stock No. 001-001-00428-6, are available from the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402 for \$3.75.

THE VICISSITUDES OF VEGETABLES

A Fresh Outlook. During the 1940's, Americans began to switch from fresh vegetables to processed vegetables. In 1972 fresh vegetables hit the pits when a low of 96 pounds per capita was eaten. Then, a turnaround occurred. Since 1972, Americans have been slowly eating their way back to fresh. In 1976 we each ate 100 pounds of fresh vegetables as compared with 102 pounds of canned and 20 pounds of frozen. Fresh vegetables took a slight dip in 1977 when freezes and droughts in major vegetable-growing areas cut down supplies and forced up prices. But the new-found popularity of fresh vegetables appears to be headed for salad days. In fact, salads are one of the reasons the use of fresh vegetables has increased. Vegetables generally provide fewer calories than equal amounts of meat. As Americans have become more health- and calorie-conscious, what better way to get a tasty dish with fewer calories than via a salad? So, not surprisingly, leaders among the vegetables are those necessities of the restaurant salad bar and home dinner salad: lettuce, tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers and celery. However, not all vegetables are in on the popularity trend: sweet potatoes, peas, lima beans and other relatively high-calorie vegetables have been shunned for the salad vegetables and other dieter delights such as cauliflower, broccoli and snap beans. On the other hand, there is sweet corn, the consumption of which has increased 12 percent from 1970 to 1976. But then that's understandable. Yum.

LEUKEMIA INHIBITOR WAS SCARCE.

So Back To The Test Tube. Back in 1969, researchers working on USDA's ongoing program to identify cancer fighters hidden in plants, discovered a good thing. It was harringtonine, a compound that slowed the progress of leukemia in laboratory mice. In 1976 the compound showed further promise for human leukemia sufferers in tests conducted in the People's Republic of China. But harringtonine is very scarce. Its source is a rare Asian evergreen tree, the plummyew tree, which grows slowly and yields only small amounts of the leukemia inhibitor. This scarcity led the researchers to look for other sources. Recently, they announced that it is possible to make the compound in the laboratory. The route is: harringtonine was made from cephalotaxine, an inactive compound also found in the plummyew tree. Cephalotaxine can be synthesized by scientists in the laboratory from readily available commercial materials. So it follows that harringtonine can be made in the laboratory from cephalotaxine which can be made from readily available materials. Exit left, the plummyew tree.

SERVICE is a monthly newsletter of consumer interest. It is designed for those who report to the individual consumer rather than for mass distribution. For information about items in this issue, write Lillie Vincent, Editor of Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of Governmental and Public Affairs, Special Reports Division, Rm. 459-A, Washington, DC 20250, or Tel. 202-447-5437.
